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SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH CREATES ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION

REF: AMMAN 05451

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (U) King Abdullah, in a letter dated June 26 and released publicly, instructed Prime Minister Adnan Badran to form an independent commission to fight corruption. This commission, according to the letter, was charged with drafting an anti-corruption law designed to ensure transparency, justice and integrity in Jordan. The commission is part of a package of steps (to be reported septel) the GOJ is taking in part to head off discontent over recent fuel price increases (reftel), but more fundamentally to demonstrate commitment to broad reforms.

2. (U) Members of the commission include newly named Minister of Justice Abed Al-Shakhanbeh and Head of the Legislative Bureau at the Prime Ministry (and former Justice Minister) Mohammad Al-Alawneh. The commission's mandate is to develop an anti-corruption law and monitor all state agencies, civil society institutions, public shareholding companies, and establishments that deal with the public sector. On July 12 the Cabinet endorsed the draft law submitted by the commission, that is slated to be presented to the Jordanian Parliament in the extraordinary session to begin in mid-July.

3. (U) MPs, political activists and commentators have reacted positively. The Jordan Times, polling opinions from selected economists and investment experts, reported their views that the new anti-corruption commission could lead to greater foreign direct investment in Jordan, inasmuch as curbing corruption could create a more investment-friendly environment.

4. (C) Although reactions portrayed in the media have been positive, many Jordanians privately remain skeptical as to whether the commission will have any real impact. In the minds of these skeptics, past experience has shown that ending, or even curbing, corruption is very difficult. Key issues for Al-Alawneh and Al-Shakhanbeh (neither of whom has a track record as a champion against corruption) will be overcoming public skepticism and establishing effective means to initiate real action. The King has shown determination in private to create a meaningful, effective anti-corruption tool, as he realizes Jordan's leadership risked a tarnished reputation. He deliberately took this step in order to replace the anti-corruption unit at the General Intelligence Directorate (GID). After Saad Khayr's removal from the GID, the King learned, to his dismay, that that unit was in fact a major source of corrupt practices within the government. Deputy Prime Minister Al-Muasher told Charge that Parliament's adoption of the legislation needed to create the commission was the government's priority for the extraordinary session, second only to winning a vote of confidence.

5. (C) COMMENT: The new anti-corruption directive comes at a time when the GOJ's lifting of fuel subsidies (reftel) is bound to cause public discontent. Mindful of widespread rumors of the misuse or siphoning off of government money, the GOJ's re-emphasis of anti-corruption measures is in part an element of a strategy aimed at demonstrating a commitment to transparent use of public funds, and reinforcement of the patchy social safety net, at a time of belt tightening (septel). However, it is also meant to signal to domestic and foreign audiences that the government is serious about reform. END COMMENT.

HALE